

STARE INSIEME  
On self-education inside / out

---

*...In every situation there is one line that stands out among all the others, the line along which power grows. Thought is the capacity for singling out this line, and following it. That a form-of-life can only be assumed by following this line means: all thought is strategic.<sup>1</sup>*

---

The desire for what might be termed autonomous forms of organisation, the crystallisation of a group identity with a shared impetus on self-education and collectivity gave rise to the founding of the project Fakultät Null (Faculty Zero), which had its roots in the Berlin University of Arts<sup>2</sup>.

The university initially marked a kind of negative reference from which Fakultät Null sought to take flight, symbolically annulling its dull categorizations of art versus knowledge and the sentimental colour-palette of academic art education applied in this secluded and exclusive space.

It is obvious that Fakultät Null, resting to a large degree on mere performativity, a digital surface, and hardly providing actual spaces and means for artistic production or simple gathering, can barely be seen to pose a counter-model to the realities of the educational institution. Despite this slightly uneven power relation, it does not shy away from performing a rather militant discourse in proclaiming the existence of an anti-academy based on collective experience beyond the realms of art production and the imposed order of artistic disciplines.

One might argue however that precisely by enforcing this type of secessionist gesture, the project confirms or posits the institution it seeks to depart from. In projecting onto it the grand evil, the own agenda receives legitimacy only by way of negatively relating to the workings of the university. The moment the university changes its face, reforms its study plan or simply hires a little more progressive teaching staff, the backdrop for such embodied criticality eventually turns frail. A project which rests its argument solely on an actually existing institution instead of generalising its claims fails to politicize its agenda and has little capacity to continue and expand beyond its initial framework.

Yet there is one remarkable experience from this art educational context, which might be worth recalled, not least as an attempt to draw generalising conclusions.

Being a „critical art student“, allegedly dealing with a lack of autonomy, subjected to the educational machine and all sorts of art-related mythology, one enters into blatant antagonism with the institutional discourse – namely with what I want to call its *freedom-speech*. Referring to classic enlightenment-values such as freedom of art and academic freedom, the art university on the one hand seeks to keep demands

---

<sup>1</sup> Tiqqun: *Introduction to Civil War*

<sup>2</sup> [www.fakultaetnull.org](http://www.fakultaetnull.org)

from industry and neoliberal reform of the educational sector at bay, under the cover of a rather traditionalist and elitist habitus. At the same time however, and without blinking an eye, the Berlin University of Art fractured its own institutional body into different sectors, in fact quite different organs: newly developed income-generating post-gradual programmes (financed via surprisingly high fees) coexist now with a majority of faculties and programmes standardised over the past years according to what became known as the Bologna reform. However, these latter programmes still remain free from tuition fees. Finally, there is a faculty of fine art, again fragmented into art classes with teacher training degrees under the standardised system, and the „free“ fine art classes that remain under the traditionalist system based on individual artistic development and non-modular studio practice.

It is first and foremost within this fine art faculty, structured in a stiff feudalistic order with extremely normative wage-hierarchies, where the discourse on the „freedom“ of the young artists in the safe haven of the art academy is being replicated, with hardly any hint towards the double standards practiced with regard to the university as a whole, thus re-enacting a well known trope of „free“ and „un-free“ arts – god forbid. In such environment where „anything goes“, attempts to secure and uphold not just physical but also intellectual, social resources for (wanna-be) autonomous forms of organisation turn out surprisingly problematic. As if the collective capacity to single out that „line of thought along which power grows“ slips away into the administered echo-chamber of the art academy, succumbed by the hidden but powerful ideology of *whatever-freedom* provided by the hierarchical structure of the institution.

Possibly, such diffusion of that old-school project called „autonomous education“ through the vague promises of academico-artistic-individual liberties is the place where the policing of our common desires took root? This complete lack of solidarity beyond the artistic-academic realm and the misconceived association of libertarianism with autonomy may breed fatal errors, producing far-reaching consequences for our collective upbringing. Isn't it this misconception, this contradiction that we embody and carry with us throughout our personal-professional quarrels within an existence as so called cultural producers today?

This myth of individual freedom (and the want to carry its virtues to the cultural market) impedes the emergence of parallel social organisation within cultural scenes, and it seems naive at this moment to even imagine forms of wage struggle or communal economy within this fragmented and diversified field.

It might be worth under such circumstances to start, patiently and persistently, to thoroughly analyse and map the diverging concepts and legacies of the autonomous movements, possibly in the framework of a continuous educational project. Such radical education must be understood as basis for any transformational politics, instead of being confused with a training ground for the type of critical discourse predominantly serving the needs of rejuvenated, self-reflecting art institutions (those that will be exterminated anyway with the next sweep of austerity measures).

The example of Fakultät Null encounters such problematics, once the scope of its demands – autonomous education, open institutions, collective and self-directed forms of learning and working – is applied to a sphere of production outside the art academy. What emerges from the „ruins of the bourgeois art academy“<sup>3</sup> might eventually conflate with the nightmare of life-long self-improvement for a deregulated labour market – a classic paranoia of any discourse on self-organisation.

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.fakultaetnull.org/about/manifesto/](http://www.fakultaetnull.org/about/manifesto/)

But alas, “*There is no need to ask which is the toughest regime, for it's within each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another. [...] There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.*”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, I do suggest that it is from this web of relations formed through the shared work of critical self-education, be it inside a nucleus of para-institutional student activity such as Fakultät Null or in the frame of a wide-spread university protest, in the struggle against impossible working conditions and the refusal of wage labour, and yes, also in the shared discussions on aesthetics and form-giving, that we may find a basis for establishing other modes of addressing each other, for developing a common language of affective relations, political imagination and organisation.

Never mind the institutions, their shortcomings or their death altogether; it is these bounds of collectively developed subjectivity that can be activated time and again, and time will come to call this imaginary faculty to gather again.

---

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Postscript on the Societies of Control, *October*, Vol. 59. (Winter, 1992), pp. 3-7.